

Young People's Societies

A LESSON IN PRAYER.

Topic for Sunday, August 22: Two Prayer Lessons. Matthew 6:5, 6; 18:19, 20.

DAILY READINGS.

Monday: Unanswered Prayer. Deuteronomy 3:23-29.
Tuesday: According to his will. John 14:13, 14; 15:7, 16; 16:23-27.
Wednesday: Christ's definite way. Mark 11:20-26.
Thursday: A powerful prayer. James 5:13-18.
Friday: When to pray. Ephesians 6:18; Hebrews 4:16.
Saturday: A model prayer. Ephesians 3:14-19.

Individual or personal prayer and concerted prayer are equally enjoined by the word of God.

The essentials of genuine prayer must be found in both these kinds of prayer. The requirements of each apply to the other.

First of all there must be a sense of need. Those who hunger and thirst will be filled. Those that be whole need not a physician.

Next there must be living faith. He that cometh unto God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.

Then there must be a certain degree of knowledge, to apprehend God and his truth and to insure the prayer being for things agreeable to God's will.

Following this is the determination to use all that is asked for as a means for advancing God's glory. We ask and receive not because we ask amiss, that we might spend it upon our lusts.

An element in true prayer which is often wanting is that of thankful acknowledgment of past mercies. Supplication for new favors ought to fill us full of gratitude for what we have already received.

Another element is sincere contrition with honest, sincere confession of sin. A sense of unworthiness, with real sorrow for our sin and pleading for its forgiveness through Christ will break down the greatest barrier between us and blessing.

The numbers named by the Saviour in connection with concerted prayer are just as simple as possible. Where two or three are gathered together in My name, there I am. If any two of you shall agree as touching what you would have, it will be given unto you.

Concerted prayer is apt to be less selfish than individual prayer. When two or more agree, that which is personal to either one will be apt to be ruled out. And the larger the number in perfect agreement, the more likely that their desires are born of the purest motives.

The effect of prayer may justly be regarded as two fold. Its great object is to move God, of course, and He has promised that it shall do this. But it moves the suppliant as well. It brings him into closer touch with God and thereby lifts him into a purer atmosphere and a holier life.

It is sometimes objected that it is unreasonable to believe that the mighty and great God can be drawn to us by any means whatever, much less by such a slender cord or that of simple human supplication. Suppose the objection be true. What objection is there to one being drawn to him?

If a great man-of-war out upon the sea throws out a rope to a little boat which is drifting by, and the men in the boat pull on it and are thereby drawn to safety, it may indeed be that they have not drawn the mighty ship to themselves, but they have drawn themselves to it. What matter it which was moved, just so that safety came.

One form of prayer that is most helpful, yet not as common as it should be is that of ejaculatory prayer, that is, the habit of lifting up the heart in supplication frequently in a word or two or a single prayer flashing through from the soul to God, put alongside of our daily work, making itself felt in keeping our spiritual atmosphere purer and our spiritual habits more active.

Prayer Meeting

TOPIC—"CASTING OUR BURDEN ON THE LORD."

Ps. 55: 16-22.

For the Week Beginning August 15.

This Psalm consists mainly of petitions for the punishment of wicked persons. Their guilt was aggravated and manifold. They had persecuted and oppressed the Psalmist, keeping him in continual alarm and distress. They had caused violence and strife in the city and in their homes. They were treacherous in their dealings with others, profaning their covenants and using flattering words while their hearts were full of deceit and violence. The Psalmist could have no peace.

We have in this case of the Psalmist, one of the most malignant and fruitful sources of distress. The malice and the consequent overt opposition of godless men to the kingdom of righteousness and to those who belong to that kingdom constitute a most formidable obstacle to the progress of truth, and is a relentless disturber of the peace of believers and a hindrance to the service which they would devoutly render. They know that secretly, the unbelieving and unrighteous elements of society are against them. The words of enemies are smoother than butter when their commercial or other personal interests may be promoted thereby, but their feeling toward the faith of believers is always unsympathetic and as a rule hostile. They are suspicious of the most unselfish Christian service and eager to find flaws in the professing Christian life.

In the case of the Psalmist this hostility was more pronounced because of greater opportunity. His enemies were many. They were strong enough to cause violence and strife in the city, and to go unpunished. They had their way and used deceit because it better served their purpose. The only hope of their restraint and punishment was in God's special interposition. Is this not true now in a less pronounced and more insidious form? How well do these words apply to many communities to-day. "Violence and strife in the city. Day and night they go about it upon the walls thereof. Iniquity also and mischief are in the midst of it. Wickedness is in the midst thereof. Oppression and guilt depart not from its streets." This sounds like a commentary on the municipal and commercial records of New York or Chicago.

The universal fact in organized society which is expounded in this Psalm serves certain good ends in the promotion of righteousness and the vindication of truth. It enables us to see more clearly the heinousness of sin and the hideous corruption of the carnal nature, and inspires the prayer that the wickedness of the wicked may come to an end. It cuts up by the roots those fantastic and arrogant assumptions that just now emanate so copiously from New England and elsewhere, to the effect that human nature has within itself the potentiality for attaining moral perfection and consequent eternal life. Unsanctified human nature by its unvarying tendencies and by its life record, paints itself in its own essential blackness.

Such a fact, proclaiming itself in actual life, stimulates endeavor to resist and counteract its dangerous tendencies. The very sight of the ruin which sin has wrought and is working, kindles our zeal and incites to a courageous purpose to give ourselves with firm resolve and brave hearts and self-surrender, to the cause of resisting the aggressions of evil and driving it from its lurking places in the social order. At times sin becomes so audacious and so repulsive as to be a source of humiliation and shame to a community or a nation. Its loathsome character arouses Christian sentiment and the true manhood and womanhood of the people assert themselves and in righteous indignation they rebuke it.

The Church is sometimes reproached for its voluntary aggression against wickedness. In the first place it is not voluntary. We are commanded to fight the good fight of faith, to resist the devil and to have no fellowship with the unfaithful works of darkness but rather reprove them. Secondly, prevailing wickedness constitutes to devout souls an unbearable burden, and they are instructed to cast their burden on the Lord which implies the faithful exercise of all their sanctified powers, for its rebuke and its removal.